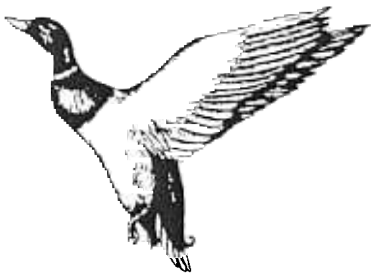
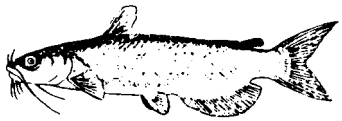


IMPROVING FARM PONDS FOR DUCKS



Biology Job Sheet TX-15

To improve farm ponds for ducks, two criteria must be considered: Food and depth of water. Deeper ponds with little shallow water less than two feet deep attract diving ducks such as scaup, ringneck, bufflehead, goldeneye and ruddy ducks. Ponds with shallower areas attract dabbling ducks such as mallards, teal, pintail, gadwall, widgeon, and wood ducks.

Most diving ducks are attracted to larger lakes and reservoirs so the greatest potential for farm ponds is in providing dabbling duck habitat.

Key practices for improving farm ponds for ducks include:

Site Selection

1. Select areas with existing shallow flats or potential for shallow flat construction. Dabbling ducks feed in areas of water depths ranging from a few inches to 15 inches deep.

Controlling Water Levels

2. Install a water level control structure. Lowering water levels in early summer to expose shallow areas will often produce natural duck foods such as duck potato and smartweed. Care should be taken not to draw the water down until June if fish production is important.

Planting Duck Food

3. Exposed mud flats can be planted to Japanese millet without soil disturbance by broadcasting 20# per acre in July. Apply 400# per acre of 8-8-8. After plants start growing they will tolerate flooding 1/4 to 1/2 their height. Flood when the seed is ripe and if large flocks of blackbirds appear.

   Rice can also be planted by drawing the water down to a few inches, broadcasting 80# per acre from May through July and drawing the water off completely 24 to 48 hours later. Plants can be flooded after they begin tillering (sending off new shoots at the ground), but should not be flooded deeper than six inches until seeding. Suitable varieties include LaBelle, Bellmont, and Nova 76.

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Drier shoreline areas as well as uplands adjacent to the high water line can be planted to browntop millet by seeding 20# per acre. Drill 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep or broadcast and drag. Apply 500# of 5-10-10- per acre.

Smartweeds, either rootstock or seed can be purchased from out-of-state sources but stand success may be questionable. Wild seedlings can also be transplanted in the spring. Space plants 2 to 3 feet apart, and keep the soil moist. A poor smartweed stand can be improved by (1) burning in early spring after the water is drained, (2) burning followed by light disking, (3) disking only, or (4) grazing moderately.

Improving the Pond for Wood Ducks

4. Certain farm ponds in the eastern part of the State can provide good breeding habitat for wood ducks if certain conditions are met. The pond should have an irregular shoreline, a good aquatic plant community (water pennywort, pondweeds, and duckweeds preferred), and at least part of the shoreline developed in brush or tall grasses to provide escape cover for ducklings. One nesting box with predator guard can be erected for each acre of pond. More can be added as use exceeds 50%. They should be erected before the hens arrive in February and maintained each winter thereafter by cleaning out and replacing the nesting material. Minimum height for box placement should be five feet.